

BOUNDARY AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2023 at 1.00 pm at Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Jack Packman (Chair); Councillors Everitt, D Green, Kup and Wright

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Councillor Kup proposed, Councillor Everitt seconded and Members agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the working party meeting held on 21 November 2023.

4. REVISED SUBMISSION DOCUMENT

Charles Hungwe, Deputy Committee Services Manager introduced the report and made the following comments:

- The submission document before Members was being brought back to the working party following the decision at Full Council to agree the working party recommendation that the total number of ward Councillors for Thanet District Council be changed 56 to 42 and that this proposed number be forwarded to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). If agreed by the LGBCE (the Commission), this would be the number to be used for the Local Government Elections in May 2027;
- Now that the number has been agreed by Full Council, it could not be changed, until it was submitted as part of the submission document content to the Commission and could now only be changed by the Commission;
- An updated graph was provided to Members reflecting the electorate ratio of the Council in comparison with other comparator Councils, showing the current number of 56 councillors as well as the new proposed number of 42 councillors. The graph showed that the new proposed number put Thanet District Council in the middle of the graph, showing a median balance that both Officers and Members agreed with;
- A supporting table was also provided to Members which showed the electorate ratio changing from 1721 for the current 56 Councillors to 2295 for the newly proposed 42 Councillors, again showing a ratio that was in the middle of the pack of other comparator Councils;
- This revised submission document contained the evidence that officers felt confident that it would be viewed by the LGBCE as providing good evidence to support the view that the proposed total number of 42 councillors was a viable proposal.

Members noted the report.

5. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Hannah Thorpe, Head of Strategy and Transformation introduced the report and made the following comments:

- The new communications plan and process will need to be submitted to the LGBCE, where they will be providing new design assets that will be provided to Members;
- The council's role is to amplify the messaging from the LGBCE, publicise the electoral review and encourage local people to inform stakeholders, local community groups, staff and Members of the Public to encourage engagement and participation of the review;
- The overall goal for communications was to make sure that people know why the review was going forward and to offer guidance to those who needed it;
- Communication was going to be made through all of the Council's available channels such as a press release, social media and posters; as a way to inform Members of the Public who may not be online in a clear and easy to way to understand;
- The consultation will be held in two phases. The first will be the launch of initial consultation on new wards (March-May 2024), the second will be the draft recommendations for new ward boundaries (September - November 2024). There will be ongoing communications throughout the year to support and promote this.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Members wanted to make it clear, when it comes to any informative materials, that the changes would come in effect in 2027 to avoid any confusion;
- Members also wanted to know if Parish and Town Councils would be informed as well. Officers noted the concerns of confusion around timing and informed Members that although not in the initial plan, local Parish and Town Councils will be updated going forward;
- Members asked how the ward radius would be decided in the new plan and commented on their feedback regarding splitting their own wards. Officers said there was a number of ways to determine the new ward areas and will report back as the Council would have their own proposals;
- Members were enthusiastic that with this new engagement, it would increase involvement from the Members of the Public in Council interests.

Members noted the report.

6. NEXT STEPS

Charles Hungwe, introduced the report and made the following comments:

- The next steps set out details of the key deadline dates for completing the boundary review for Thanet District Council and included deadlines for various phases of the review process leading up to the setting up of new ward boundaries for the district;
- During the Council meeting on 7 December 2023, Members agreed the working party recommendation that the total number of 42 councillors be forwarded to the LGBCE. This was Phase 1 of the review process;
- Officers were looking to submit this draft number to the LGBCE by Friday, 15 December 2023, keeping in line with the deadline of 2 January 2024. The final number submission date is 30 January 2023. In that time, the LGBCE could provide feedback and advice for any minor changes that were required of the Council to make. However these changes and updates excluded changing the already submitted councillor number;

- Once the response has been provided by LGBCE, with no objection to the proposed number, Phase 2 would begin on 19 March 2024; which involved opening up to consultation regarding the warding patterns. This consultation would last 10 weeks and this would mean arranging additional meetings for the BEAWP. The end of the consultation period is 27 May 2024;
- Following Phase 2 and the consultation period, Phase 3 would begin which would include proposing new ward boundaries. A consultation on draft recommendations starting 3 September 2024 would be conducted. Again, this was a 10 week period where the BEAWP would continue to take the lead regarding coming up with recommended new ward boundaries. The end of the consultation period is 11 November 2024;
- Phase 4 will conclude this process, with February 2025 being targeted as the date the LGBCE will publish the final recommendations and Spring 2025, being the period when the Order for Parliament is made. This Order would confirm the new ward and parish electoral boundaries for Thanet District. Once the Order was published, this would be confirmation of the new electoral boundaries to be used for the 5 May 2027 Local Government Elections.

A Member asked who the decision maker would be to make those recommendations to the LGBCE for the new electoral ward boundaries.

It was confirmed that the Council would need to come up with its own recommendations and the process would be led by the BEAWP. However, any political group was free to submit its own proposals, in addition to the Thanet District Council position.

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 1:21pm